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The Role of Imagination in Literary Journalism

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Abstract: Despite a range of scholars, media ethicists, and practitioners claiming its centrality to journalistic practice, the role of the imagination in literary journalism is somewhat ambiguous and, consequently, often misunderstood. This is arguably due to the ambivalent relationship scholars and philosophers have historically had with this powerful mental faculty and the close connection between the imagination, invention, and the writing of fiction. As this essay argues, however, invention and imagination are not synonymous; indeed, according to epistemologist Lorraine Code, reason and imagination work together to produce narrative forms that are essential for the characterization of human action. This inquiry begins with a brief historical survey of the historical developments that inform a contemporary understanding of the role of the imagination and continues by offering an initial investigation into a range of ways such an understanding can impact literary journalistic practice. Some of the areas discussed include: time, immersion, emplotment, and the relationship between knowledge and understanding. The study also suggests that the imagination has an ethical role to play in the construction of literary journalism, arguing that imaginative projection should not be thought of as a fanciful invention, but rather as an epistemological and moral exercise that recognizes the potential radical difference of experience between practitioner and subject. Thus, the exploration finds that the imagination is indeed a key component of literary journalistic practice and further proposes that practitioners and theorists alike can benefit from a deeper understanding of its role in the representation of reality.

Keywords: imagination – literary journalism – representation – objectivity – responsibility and reliability

> Reason is to imagination as the instrument to the agent, as the body to the spirit, as the shadow to the substance. — Shelley, "A Defence of Poetry" (1821)

Given its association with *creativity* and *invention* in mainstream use, the term *imagination* might at first glance appear to sit uncomfortably in many journalistic traditions. After all, disciplines such as fact checking, verification, and employing empirical methods to test information and avoid bias have been considered core professional and moral responsibilities for journalists in modern times.[1]

Such discomfort is understandable: John Hartsock observes that "modern objective journalism" grew out of an Enlightenment belief that science could reform and renew society, and that this agenda emphasized verifiability, objectivity, and dispassionate prose.[2] However, in recent times "imagination" has been widely acknowledged by scholars as having a key role in journalism practice. In their introduction to the first volume of *Global Literary Journalism*, John Tulloch and Richard Lance Keeble open with a quote in which imagination and memory are likened to Siamese twins that cannot be easily separated: "Trying to re-create events on the page as you remember them, and building them into the form of a story," Jonathan Raban writes, "is an act of imagination, however closely you try to stick to what seem to have been the facts."[3] The second volume of the series references the "marginalization of the journalistic imagination,"[4] which is attributed to journalism's low status in literary and academic circles, but scholars argue that despite its low visibility, imagination is central to the reporting process. Journalism historian Michael Schudson, for example, observes that "no reporter just 'gets the facts.' Reporters make stories. . . . It cannot be done without play and imagination,"[5] and that "description is always an act of imagination."[6] Media ethicist Sandra Borden similarly notes that "journalists do not just passively transmit observations of empirical phenomena. Reporters actively construct news by giving narrative form to their sense making."[7] Former *Chicago Tribune* publisher and media ethicist Jack Fuller also addresses the role of the journalistic imagination when he writes: "Every waking moment we impose order on the flux of experience by an act of the brain that could be described as imagination. So it is not surprising that the imaginative ordering turns out to be common to the writing both of fact and fiction, or that one can inform the other in fundamental ways."[8]

Perhaps the most considered scholarship on the role of the imagination in journalism can be found in G. Stuart Adam's *Notes towards a Definition of Journalism*. Adam's central contention is that journalism is an imagined way

of knowing the world. He draws on sociological and philosophical traditions to highlight the imagination's dual role of forming and organizing images, defining journalism as "a cultural practice, a section or part of the modern Imagination that in its broadest and most comprehensive sense includes all the devices we use to form consciousness."[9] In this way, journalism is an invention: a thought experiment realized, normalized, and sanctioned through systematic methodological approaches. Adam proposes that the journalistic imagination resides in individuals—in their subjective experience of the world and way of organizing that experience—and collectively, as a cultural form of expression comparable to other art forms.[10] Framing journalism in this way allows Adam to open up analysis to "more ambitious forms" than hard news by focusing on what it is than that what it does.[11]

Literary journalism is arguably one of the most ambitious forms of journalism; it aims to reveal "a larger truth than is possible through the mere compilation of verifiable facts."[12] As such, it invites discussion of the imagination's role in representing reality from a unique angle. Thomas B. Connery notes that the genre merges what Archibald MacLeish has described as the concerns of journalism, that is, "the look of the world," and the concerns of poetry, or "the feel of the world."[13] This merging delivers what Connery elsewhere described as a "felt sense of the quality of life at a particular time and place."[14] Features such as narrative mode, fine detail, dynamic structure, voice, a literary prose style, scene construction, exhaustive research, dialogue in full, and use of symbolism or symbolic reality[15] invite reflection as much for the light they shed on the nature of representation as for the knowledge and truth claims asserted by the genre. As Keeble observes, "By stressing the creativity of journalism . . . we can identify it as a specific literary field, yet one closely linked to fiction—and the other arts."[16] Consequently, this research explores the role of the imagination in literary journalism and aims to clarify terminology that often causes contention in scholarship and practice. Some implications are considered in light of contemporary practice.

Reality, Reliability and Responsibility

By defining journalism as "a form of expression that is an invention. . . . a creation—a product of the Imagination—in both an individual and a cultural sense,"[17] Adam is drawing on a Kantian concept epistemologist Lorraine Code holds as "one of the most important innovations in the history of philosophy": the "creative synthesis of the imagination."[18] For Code, this synthesis accounts for "the *creative* nature of human cognition: a taking and structuring of experience, not a passive receiving and recording."[19] She emphasizes the active nature of knowers, as they select, judge, and structure

their experience, and recognizes that "the subjective possibilities of making sense of experience are many and varied" despite the "constraints imposed" by phenomenal world and our cognitive capacity.[20] In this sense, *knowing* is ultimately a creative process: The imagination forms images to produce conscious pictures of the world, creatively synthesizing this information to organize and make meaning. The term *fiction*, from the Latin verb *fingere* meaning "to make or shape,"[21] could therefore apply to all human cognition. But, crucially for Code, constraints imposed by the physical world and cognitive capacity limit the way knowledge can be structured and claims that can be made about real events.

One implication of conceptualizing imagination in this way for literary journalism is the emphasis on responsibility over reliability when representing reality. Theories that deny the possibility of representing reality are arguably antithetical to the practice of literary journalism. As practitioner Arnon Grunberg suggests: "Doubt and skepticism about what constitutes reality are very healthy, but denying the distinction between fiction and reality . . . points to an attitude that results from a lack of skepticism and doubt. Reality offers a few 'truths,' which leave not a lot of room for skepticism. Go and stand on a rail track for instance, and wait for the train to come."[22] This is not an argument for a simplistic relationship between cognition and reality, but rather an example of how reality materially affects the claims made about knowledge and experience. Grunberg's writing, however, calls for an acknowledgement of the complex relationship between verifiability and truth. Writing about Grunberg's *Chambermaids and Soldiers*, Agnes Andeweg observes: "As the narrative . . . shows, reality is multifaceted, . . . [Grunberg] makes his reader question what reality is. Not in the sense that he would deny reality exists (as the misguided representation of postmodernism goes), but in the sense of how to make sense of different versions of reality."[23] Andeweg also observes Grunberg is "very aware of the gap between truth and reality":

> Grunberg shows that "big" events break down into individual stories, into different realities, and that moral choices are never easy. A call for reality, or realism (factuality), does not necessarily bring us closer to the truth. *Realism can be understood as the privileged access to truth only when truth is just conceptualized in terms of the correspondence between representation and fact.* Truth and reality are two different things.[24]

The implication here is that truth is the product of process. It is not one end of a direct link between verifiable fact and truth; a more direct relationship exists between fact and accuracy.[25] Morrison similarly prefers to distinguish between fact and truth rather than fiction, as "facts can exist without human intelligence, but truth cannot."[26] Hartsock refers to part of this pro-

cess when he writes: "Facts can only be understood once there is a reflexive understanding of feeling or subjectivity that determines which facts are to be valued."[27] This opens up a range of possibilities for representing reality within the realm of "nonfiction," which "broaden[s] the scope of epistemology to include considerations of credibility and trust, of epistemic obligations and the legitimate scope of enquiry."[28]

Code differentiates here between "responsibilist" and "reliabilist" epistemic traditions. In her view, "a knower/believer has an important degree of choice with regard to modes of cognitive structuring, and is accountable for these choices; whereas a 'reliable' knower could simply be an accurate, and relatively passive, recorder of experience. One speaks of a 'reliable' computer, not a 'responsible' one."[29] This point illuminates a long-held distinction between mainstream and literary journalistic traditions: The degree of choice available to a daily journalist in both form and content when reporting an event is considerably less than that afforded a literary journalist. However, the "synthesis of the imagination" emphasizes the active, creative nature of all knowledge-seeking endeavors, orienting an ethical imperative from reliability to responsibility for all forms of journalism. Objectivity norms can obscure this point, but one can retain an objectivist approach towards reality while acknowledging—and even emphasizing—subjectivity. Such an approach calls for communities to actively construct and observe responsible ways of knowing, which transcend reliable ways of knowing. Adam discusses journalists in a way that highlights this issue: "Some are artists, which means they can invent with the invention, and some are bureaucrats, which means they can reproduce the invention without inventing. But all are imaginative. . . . They imagine and they fabricate images."[30] These terms sit uneasily in journalistic discourse; as John Hersey puts it: "The writer must not invent."[31] Hersey initially equates "invention" with "adding invented data," noting that distortion also stems from "subtracting observed data"; but his critique extends past content and into form. For example, he condemns the use of "tag lines": imbuing the final line of a chapter with heavy significance—often "as if" from a character's point of view.[32] The points can be made that the notion of distortion relies on an idealization of "undistorted reality," and that, as Schudson observes, "constructing" and "conjuring" the world are not the same thing.[33] But the real issue here appears to stem from a paradox: "Creating" is at once epistemically imperative and ethically taboo. While this creates an irresolvable tension, epistemic communities negotiate the way in which creativity is manifested in forms of representation. Norms and methods are arguably well established and theorized in mainstream journalism, but literary journalism scholarship and practice are still dynamic sites of negotiation.

Beyond Fact: Truth and Meaning

The process of producing knowledge that transcends fact, such as meaning and truth, can in part be explained by distinguishing between the reproductive (primary) and productive (secondary) imaginations. Heavily influenced by Immanuel Kant, Samuel Taylor Coleridge differentiated between the primary (image forming) function of the imagination, and a secondary imagination that "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify."[34] Blackburn notes that Coleridge "was the first aesthetic theorist to distinguish the possibility of disciplined, creative use of the imagination, as opposed to the idle play of fancy."[35] Importantly, "Coleridge reminds us that the primary and secondary imaginations are . . . not independent. The secondary imagination . . . takes the perceptions supplied by the more basic primary imagination and reconciles these perceptions with the full mind, not just with the understanding."[36] This dependent relationship has "a chronological implication"[37]: Judgments made by the primary imagination are immediate, while judgments are made by the secondary imagination over time. The primary imagination, in its connecting, associating, and rearranging can also be accurate or inaccurate, whereas the more creative faculty produces truthfulness through reflective judgments *and* artistic creation.

Importantly for literary journalism, "truth" here is not limited to verifiability, objectivity, and dispassionate prose, nor is it restricted to nonfigurative language. However, ways of understanding the world—and subsequent truth-claims that can be made—must be limited by reason and logic. Tarnas notes that this point is crucial: Reason and imagination have historically been understood as working in opposition to each other; but in the Kantian tradition "perception and reason are [now] recognized as being always informed by the imagination," giving rise to "an increased appreciation of the power and complexity of the unconscious, as well as new insight into the nature of archetypal pattern and meaning."[38] Another distinction between literary and more traditional forms of journalism is evident here: Objective, empirically driven journalism relies primarily on the reproductive imagination to make judgments that render the world meaningful, while literary journalists exercise the productive imagination by embracing subjectivity and affect, but more importantly to push into the symbolic realm.

Art, it can be concluded, is not limited to the domain of fiction; in fact, the synthesis of the primary and secondary imagination is vital to attain truth beyond "the mere compilation of verifiable facts."[39] This is perhaps most eloquently demonstrated through the arguments of John Dewey, who observed that the traditional role of art has been to move beyond or "break through the

crust of conventionalized and routine consciousness." He further wrote, "The freeing of the artist in literary presentation . . . is as much a precondition of the desirable creation of adequate opinion on public matters as is the freeing of social inquiry. Men's conscious life of opinion and judgment often proceeds on a superficial and trivial plane. But their lives reach a deeper level."[40] This is a strong rationale for the use literary elements in journalistic practice: Facts alone must be reconciled or synthesized not only with reason and objectivity, but with "the perceptions of the full mind,"[41] including the journalist's interpretive, subjective experience expressed through an artistic aesthetic. As Code writes, "images, metaphors, imaginings, and a governing imaginary are more and other than mere rhetorical devices, superimposed upon or embellishing an otherwise flat-footedly literal language capable, without their help, of mapping the 'outside world' congruently and with no leftovers."[42] On the contrary, the symbolic realm is vital for forming cultural consciousness and robust communities capable of transforming themselves.

Narrative Mode

For Code, narrative is an essential genre for the characterization of human action.[43] She writes, "one cannot hope to understand human action in isolation from lives, histories, contexts, and narratives, and I think it is equally true that one cannot hope to understand cognitive activity and intellectual virtue apart from lives, histories, and context."[44] Following both Adam and Code, narrative and expository modes of representation both rely on the imagination to structure and make meaning from experience. But narrative form increases the possible range of meanings that can be made in comparison to other modes of representation by virtue of its power to communicate meaning through structure. The implications here for literary journalism are important. As a genre that aspires to both accurate representation of the world and artistic or symbolic value, literary journalism may be constrained by the objects and events of the so-called real world but it also overtly relies on the creative free play and reflective judgments facilitated by the productive imagination. Time and immersion thus become keys to practice. Less constrained by time pressures of a press that increasingly relies on immediacy, the secondary imagination needs time to reflect on a range of patterns, themes, structures, symbols, and figures that could potentially represent its subject. While immersion is considered a key characteristic of literary journalism by scholars such as Bill Reynolds and Robert Boynton, who call immersion a "signature method" of reporting for literary journalism,[45] Tom Connery prefers more open boundaries, stating immersion "is *not* necessary for a work to be classified as literary journalism. Making immersion optional allows for a

broader, yet legitimate, application of the definition."[46] Connery allows that "immersion is crucial to longer, more complex articles or book-length works" but is wary of excluding texts on the basis of immersive reporting practices.[47] The role of the productive imagination would suggest, however, that time and immersion are two epistemic imperatives for knowing and representing well. While the primary imagination can recognize and schematize information both immediately and accurately, understanding issues at a deeper level and representing them in a distinctly literary manner—that is, with figurative language, symbolism, and creative consciousness—are crucially dependent on time, reflection, and the "creative synthesis of the imagination."

Emplotment

This conceptualization of the imagination also has an impact on *emplotment*. Through narrative, Vanhoozer explains the link between the literary imagination and the productive imagination: "The narrative act is a demonstration of that mysterious art, schematism, in operation. The plot, the central component of narrative, is nothing less than a creative synthesis of time, which makes a temporal whole out of an otherwise chaotic manifold of experience."[48] If this is so, reporting does not necessarily end with an event, but rather a tipping point in a practitioner's knowledge. For example, when asked when he finishes the reporting stage, William Finnegan replied: "When the story seems to have a beginning, middle, and end. When I think that the action, the narrative arc, is complete. But I'm often wrong about that, and more action often takes place while I'm writing. New endings appear. New beginnings, even."[49] Similarly, Australian writer Anna Krien reflects that she still felt like more research needed to be done after the publication of her book-length work of literary journalism, *Into the Woods*.[50] But, she states, the reporting was finished "when I went back to the island, probably for the third or fourth time, and all of a sudden I could have proper conversations with people. . . . [Before that] I was not really understanding.[51] Paul McGeough, New York–based correspondent for the *Sydney Morning Herald* and author of book-length literary journalism, uses metaphor to describe the process of producing meaningful reporting from on the ground:

> So you have to be able to . . . embrace the issue, be able to analyze it, deconstruct it, and put it back together in an envelope that's embroidered with the life and times of the people affected by the story. . . . If you're going to be regularly writing analysis and commentary on issues, you need to spend a lot of time on the ground, so that that experience—that exposure to people and circumstance—either directly or subliminally informs your writing when you're not on location.[52]

These can be understood as demonstrations of the productive imagination at work—examples of "that mysterious art, schematism, in operation."[53] And again, each example demonstrates the centrality of immersion to the literary journalistic endeavor to gather information for the secondary imagination to reflect on potential patterns, themes, structures, symbols, and figures to represent its subject(s).

Imagining, Discovering or Inventing?

Bill Reynolds's informative study of two practitioners, William Langewiesche and John Vaillant, illuminates some of the complexities created by the narrative form. Reynolds bases his article on the contention that "in long-form narrative, the story is rarely simply about the story—it is usually a metaphor for something much larger. While it is true that the best magazine pieces focus tightly on a theme, or in some cases multiple themes, there is always something else underneath the story."[54] He writes of Langewiesche's *American Ground* and Vaillant's *The Golden Spruce*[55] that "the writers discovered, first in the field and then in front of the computer screen sculpting words from the raw material of fact, the true significance and meaning of their stories."[56] Reynolds's language here is telling:

> As they searched for clues and assessed what they had found, the story began to reveal itself. It is only during this creative, artistic part of the process—the "Just what are we looking at here?" part, or the literary journalism part rather than the reporting and researching part—when their stories come to provide a worldview.[57]

The terms "discovered," "searched," and "reveal itself" here—perhaps inadvertently—indicate a belief that meaning is inherent in the events and needs to be discovered. However, Reynolds also describes the processes of assessing as the "creative, artistic part of the process." Are these ideas incongruous? Is meaning being created here? Or is it being discovered? Code's use of the "creative synthesis of the imagination" again helpfully illuminates the beliefs implied in Reynolds's article. Critically, the term "creative" here is not synonymous with "invention" or "conjecture" but rather signifies the process of structuring and synthesizing according to "many and varied" possibilities. The term "artistic" refers to the level of meaning to be attained: Abstracting meaning and truth requires higher cognitive processes than apprehending and recalling facts: This is the work of the productive imagination. Reynolds indicates as much as he notes Langewiesche's story is simple to start with. Initially it can be summarized in a sentence: "Two very large buildings collapse and a cluster of men spend several months on the cleanup."[58] However, "this deceptively simple story . . . suddenly becomes maddeningly complex."[59]

Langewiesche uses his experience as a pilot as an analogy for moving from close to long range in order to discover patterns that can be schematized into meaningful truths:

> The aerial view is something entirely new. We need to admit that it flattens the world and mutes it in a rush of air and engines, and it suppresses beauty. But it also strips the façades from our constructions, and by raising us above the constraints of the treeline and the highway it imposes a brutal honesty on our perceptions. It lets us see ourselves in context, as creatures struggling through life on the face of the planet, not separate from nature, but its most expressive agents. It lets us see that our struggles form patterns on the land, that these patterns repeat to an extent which before we had not known, and that there is a sense to them.[60]

There is an awareness here that objectivity is limited by perception. This observation is supported by the "Afterword to the Paperback Edition" in *American Ground*, where Langewiesche writes:

> It has been suggested that I must have been glad to be the only writer with free access to the inner world of the Trade Center site, but the opposite is true. There was obviously more happening there than I alone could know or describe. . . . The presence of the daily press would have served the useful role not only of informing the public but also clarifying the participants' views of themselves.[61]

The metaphor of an aerial view is invoked here again, this time in the form of the daily press as outsiders who are able to provide a wider perspective, and promote reflexivity amongst those immersed in their work at Ground Zero. This metaphor is a helpful one for literary journalists in its implication that perspective can be lost in immersive situations. As with Finnegan, Krien, and McGeough, it is important for Langewiesche that practitioners remove themselves from the immersive situation for a time—or seek perspective from other sources—in order to "know" the landscape "well."

Narrative Closure

The relationship between knowledge and understanding also has important implications for the function of closure in literary journalism. Code's work emphasizes the process or effort to achieve end-states of cognition; thus, both "knowledge and understanding are modes of interpreting experience."[62] She writes that humans can "structure experience into reasonably coherent patterns of knowledge and understanding, even though we may not know the precise relation of these patterns to the reality they purport to reflect."[63] This is in spite of the fact that "different aspects of what seems to be the *same* reality are coherent for different people in the same circumstances

and for the same person in different circumstances, and though our control over experience continually meets with limiting cases, reminding us that reality transcends our knowledge of it."[64] Knowledge, then, is apprehended from interaction with the world and structured through the imagination into patterns of understanding that cohere with—and modify—previous knowledge and understandings. For Code, understanding is "a process rather than a faculty."[65] It involves "tying one's knowledge down: relating it to a context, having some conception of the relation of this one 'bit' of knowledge to the rest of what one knows."[66]

> Understanding, then, involves a just apprehension of significance and endorses an ideal of seeing things "whole" in some sense. This characterization is somewhat paradoxical, given the unlikelihood of ever achieving perfect understanding, but *seeing things "whole" is subtly different from seeing them completely, understanding them utterly.* It has more to do with apprehending connectedness and significance. Indeed, one of the reasons understanding is so difficult and so neglected an epistemological concept may stem from its being always a matter of degree.[67]

The difference here between seeing things whole or completely may be subtle, but it affects degrees of narrative closure. Connecting elements of knowledge produces meaning; that is, connectedness produces significance; however, closure often imposes a single or limited meaning on events that are inevitably open to resignification.

To return to the example of *American Ground,* the narrative scope for Langewiesche was "readymade," according to Reynolds, "with the attacks [on the World Trade Center] at the beginning and a ceremony nine months later acting as natural bookends. But still, Langewiesche needed to find the story within these generous parameters."[68] Some may take issue with the term "natural bookends" but the point is that the attack marked the beginning of the World Trade Center's deconstruction, and the ceremony marked the end of that particular process. Evidently, these points have been chosen by Langewiesche to start and end his narrative, but they could be considered neither arbitrary nor random when considering their impact on narrative closure. Reynolds writes that "five weeks after the twin towers fell," Langewiesche "began to see the unfolding drama as a positive story in the midst of so much misery. . . . Buried underneath a mountain of man-made junk was the will to create a new world."[69] Langewiesche recalls: "It was obvious to me that we were looking at much, much more. That view came from being on the inside; it was not an external view at all. . . . An amazing experiment was happening before our very eyes. . . ." Reynolds observed that "Telling this story exposed," in Langewiesche's words, "to us (the observer, the writer, and then the reader) who we are."[70]

The accumulation of knowledge structured into coherent patterns of understanding produced, for Langewiesche, insight into the nature of U.S. citizens. The process of understanding and signification, however, did not end there. Interestingly, Langewiesche later modified his understanding of the meaning signified by the events he witnessed. Reynolds writes: "He decided he had been too absorbed in the tiny world of Ground Zero during those months of intense, on-site reporting to pay much attention to the George W. Bush administration's exploitation of patriotism and 9/11 for its own ends."[71] This observation illustrates Code's point that understanding is "a matter of degree."[72] Langewiesche's position on Ground Zero afforded him a "whole" view in that he, in Code's words, "apprehend[ed] connectedness"—or understood how the elements affected each other in coherent patterns, but his perspective was limited by his position on the ground. Time, distance from his subject, and new knowledge modified his understanding, which produced a new understanding from the events he researched. Consequently, this should be reflected in the degree to which a work of narrative literary journalism achieves closure: A high degree of closure is often inconsistent with a world that is open to a range of interpretive possibilities.

Imagination and the Ethical Imperative

As well as raising epistemic issues, the role of the imagination in literary journalism also has a strong ethical dimension. Susan Greenberg raised this point in her exploration into the relationship between ethics and aesthetics in narrative. Greenberg argues that the aesthetic dimension of literary journalism carries with it an ethical imperative. Based on the nature of the narrative situation, the writer has a responsibility to both the reader and the subject: to the former in "imagining the *effect* that words on a page might have on another person,"[73] and the latter in considering alternative ways of experiencing and representing reality that might be different from one's own experience.[74] Greenberg quotes Kenneth Burke to make the point that reason and imagination should work in dialogue with the "other": "Imagination can be thought of as reordering the objects of sense, or taking them apart and imagining them in new combinations . . . that do not themselves derive from sensory experience."[75] The imagination then is a faculty that allows for projection into another's experience; indeed the possibility *obliges* the literary journalist to consider alternate experiences of their subject. As Code writes: "The power of the imagination . . . is in its commitment to taking seriously the possibility—indeed the high *probability*—of radical difference: the possibility that points of commonality across lives, circumstances, and responses to them, ways of living in and with them, experiencing them, might very well

be far fewer than liberal theory and social-political policies designed according to its ready-made template often take, unimaginatively, for granted."[76]

The same point may be made for narrative structures or genres: For the literary journalist, the creative synthesis of the imagination means that experience can be structured in multiple ways to produce different truths or cohere to a range of narrative structures or archetypes. Implicit in this point is an encouragement to imaginatively project a range of possibilities rather than relying on a subjective experience of truth, as in the following anecdote from *The Gang Who Wouldn't Write Straight*: "The story was laying itself out for him like a tidy Hollywood movie, Sack thought, with a cast that represented a cross section of class and social attitudes, but he knew better than to prematurely impose neat parameters on it."[77] This kind of imaginative projection must be distinguished from fanciful invention; it is rather an epistemological and moral exercise that recognizes the potential radical difference of experience. As one historian reminds us, placing value on the accuracy of facts alone usually allows only one perspective from which those facts are viewed: This "may preclude the accurate representation of the *meaning* of an event to the differently positioned historical participants, let alone their descendants."[78]

Conclusion

This study has sought to explore a range of features, roles, and functions of the imagination in the context of literary journalism. Framing both theory and practice through *the creative synthesis of the imagination* is productive in a number of ways.

First, scholars who argue that the imagination is central to journalistic practice are clearly justified in doing so. As the primary or image-forming faculty, the imagination is crucial to the way humans apprehend and represent the world. Acknowledging its active, creative nature creates an ethical imperative to be responsible about not just what can be known, but also ways of knowing. But it also invites innovation, creativity and opportunity for reforming and representing experience within the framework of epistemic responsibility. As a creative faculty, the imagination synthesizes material reality in the form of symbols, images, and figures to create meaning beyond that produced by verifiable facts, allowing a community to *know* and reflect on itself in abstraction, which is often a necessary precursor for change. Its productive and reproductive functions reinforce the importance of allowing time to elapse before conclusions are drawn, judgments are made, or emplotment designed.

Immersion is also highlighted as a key literary journalistic practice—even as distance from a subject is also vital to change perspective and take a broader

or aerial view to allow for reflection and [re]configuration. Further, practitioners should be wary of imposing a high degree of closure in works of literary journalism in deference to the range of possibilities afforded by *imaginative*—which can be read as highly researched, interpretive, schematized, reflexive, symbolic, and epistemically justified—engagement with a subject. As Code notes, claiming a place for the imagination in the construction of knowledge "demands a certain epistemic humility prompted by wariness of premature closure . . . further complicated by a recognition that 'we' cannot always know the truths of our own lives."[79]

Finally, conceptualizing the role of the imagination in literary journalism in this way highlights the possibility of thinking "one's way into the situations of differently situated Others, including . . . the marginalized."[80] Given that one of literary journalism's purposes "is to narrow the distance between subjectivity and the object,"[81] the imagination clearly has an important role in structuring experience to minimize this gap. While Tulloch and Keeble are indeed correct in their observation that it has been marginalized, reassessing the imagination's role in literary journalism reaffirms that practitioners can take part in "the emancipatory practice of imagining *alternative* horizons of existence"[82] creatively, innovatively, and responsibly. As G. Stuart Adam writes, journalism is one starting point for civilized life and discourse, and as such "should be bathed in the light of the Imagination and the idea that journalism can be and often is one of our highest arts."[83]

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Notes

[1] Fuller, *News Values*; Kieran, "The Regulatory and Ethical Framework for Investigative Journalism"; Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*.

[2] Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, 124–25.

[3] Tulloch and Keeble, "Mind the Gaps," 1:1; Raban, *For Love and Money*, 165.

[4] Keeble and Tulloch, eds., *Global Literary Journalism,* 2:3.

[5] Schudson, *The Power of News*, 96.

[6] Schudson, 108.

[7] Borden, *Journalism as Practice*, 52–53.

[8] Fuller, *News Values*, 161.

[9] Adam, *Notes towards a Definition of Journalism*, 45.

[10] Adam, 20.

[11] Adam, 46.

[12] Talese, *Fame and Obscurity*, vii.

[13] Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, 11; MacLeish, "Poetry and Journalism," 13; MacLeish, "The Poet and the Press," 43–44.

[14] Connery quoted in Sims, "The Art of Literary Journalism," 4.

[15] See Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*; Hartsock, *History of American Literary Journalism*; Lounsberry, *The Art of Fact*; Sims and Kramer, *Literary Journalism*.

[16] Keeble, "On Journalism, Creativity and the Imagination," in *The Journalistic Imagination*, 2.

[17] Adam, *Notes towards a Definition of Journalism*, 13.

[18] Code*, Epistemic Responsibility*, 77.

[19] Code*,* 77.

[20] Code*,* 77.

[21] Scholes, *Elements of Fiction*, 1–2; Hellmann, *Fables of Fact*, 17–18; see also Hollowell, *Fact and Fiction*.

[22] Grunberg quoted in Harbers, "Between Fact and Fiction: Arnon Grunberg on His Literary Journalism," 80.

[23] Grunberg, *Kamermeisjes en soldaten* [Chambermaids and Soldiers] (translations mine); Andeweg, "Searching for Truth: Arnon Grunberg's Literary Journalism," 63.

[24] Andeweg, 63 (emphasis mine).

[25] Kieran, "The Regulatory and Ethical Framework for Investigative Journalism," 156–76; Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*.

[26] Morrison, "The Site of Memory," 113; see also Lehman, *Matters of Fact*, 33.

[27] Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, 180.

[28] Code, "Responsibility and Rhetoric," 3.

[29] Code, *Epistemic Responsibility*, 51.

[30] Adam, *Notes towards a Definition of Journalism*, 16.

[31] Hersey, "The Legend on the License," 68.

[32] Hersey, 80.

[33] Schudson, *The Sociology of News*, xiv.

[34] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria,* 1:304.
[35] Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, s.v., "Imagination."
[36] Engell and Bate, "Editors' Introduction," in *Biographia Literaria*, xci.
[37] Engell and Bate, xcii.
[38] Tarnas, *Passion of the Western Mind*, 405.
[39] Talese, *Fame and Obscurity*, vii.
[40] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 183.
[41] Engell and Bate, "Editors' Introduction," xci.
[42] Code, *Ecological Thinking*, 213.
[43] Code, Epistemic Responsibility, 29.
[44] Code, 28.
[45] Reynolds, "A Metaphor for the World," 62; Boynton, introduction to *The New New Journalism*, xv; see also Lounsberry, *The Art of Fact*; Sims, "*Literary Journalists*."
[46] Connery, *A Sourcebook of American Literary Journalism*, 12.
[47] Connery, 13.
[48] Vanhoozer, "Philosophical Antecedents to Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*," 41.
[49] Finnegan quoted in Boynton, "William Finnegan," in *The New New Journalism*, 96.
[50] Krien, *Into the Woods*.
[51] Krien, "Conversation," *The Monthly*; Krien, "Meet the Author: Anna Krien."
[52] McGeough, interview with the author, December 2, 2015.
[53] Vanhoozer, "Philosophical Antecedents to Ricoeur's *Time and Narrative*," 41.
[54] Reynolds, "A Metaphor for the World," 60.
[55] Langewiesche, *American Ground*; Vaillant, *The Golden Spruce*.
[56] Reynolds, "A Metaphor for the World," 60.
[57] Reynolds, 60.
[58] Reynolds, 63.
[59] Reynolds, 63.
[60] Langewiesche, *Inside the Sky*, 4.
[61] Langewiesche, "Afterword to the Paperback Edition," in *American Ground*, 210.
[62] Code, *Epistemic Responsibility*, 135.
[63] Code, 133.
[64] Code, 133 (emphasis in original).
[65] Code, 148.
[66] Code, 150.
[67] Code, 150–1 (emphasis mine).
[68] Reynolds, "A Metaphor for the World," 65.
[69] Reynolds, 67.
[70] Langewiesche, quoted by Reynolds, "A Metaphor for the World," 65, from first interview with Reynolds, November 4, 2002.
[71] Langewiesche, quoted by Reynolds, "A Metaphor for the World," 67, from third interview with Reynolds, August 2, 2004.

[72] Code, *Epistemic Responsibility*, 151.

[73] Greenberg, "The Ethics of Narrative," 521 (emphasis in the original).

[74] Greenberg, 520.

[75] Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 79; Greenberg, "The Ethics of Narrative," 520.

[76] Code, *Ecological Thinking*, 206 (emphasis in the original).

[77] Weingarten, *The Gang That Wouldn't Write Straight*, 152.

[78] Cowlishaw, "Arbiters of the Past," 211 (emphasis in original).

[79] Code, *Ecological Thinking*, 207.

[80] Code, 207.

[81] Hartsock, *A History of American Literary Journalism*, 132.

[82] Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination*, 30 (emphasis in original); Greenberg, "The Ethics of Narrative," 527.

[83] Adam, *Notes towards a Definition of Journalism*, 48.

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